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Bombshell Suggestion for Ending the War

The chief of staff of the U.S. Army, in a 1966 Saigon briefing session, suggested bombing Peking as one way to win the Vietnam war, according to a top-secret memo declassified in the Westmoreland/CBS libel case. Yet another memo unearthed in pretrial discovery shows that the Strategic Air Command was conducting photographic reconnaissance of southern China.

Though these documents are peripheral to the main issue in *Westmoreland v. CBS*—whether or not the network libeled the U.S. Vietnam commander in its January 1982 documentary *The Uncounted Enemy: A Vietnam Deception*—they nevertheless are available to anyone willing to sift through the hundreds of thousands of pages of classified material gathered by each side in discovery. In fact, these historical insights could be the trial's true, lasting legacy: the bringing to light of records that would ordinarily have remained classified for years.

Take General Harold K. Johnson's apparent suggestion to bomb Peking. This is contained in an unsigned, contemporary narrative of a briefing held in Saigon for Johnson on April 18, 1966. The narrative says:

"Commenting on the so-called 'barrier' program [see Monitor, July 24], on which there are disparate views, CSA [Chief of Staff, Army] commented that operations within SVN [South Vietnam] seemed to consist largely of 'mopping up the floor' rather than actually 'shutting off the spigot' through which infiltrators into SVN are known to pass. This was a clear implication that, in CSA's view, the program within SVN was not going after the source of the problem. He went even so far as to indicate Peking as an appropriate target."

Though this may have been no more than idle chatter on the part of General Johnson (for all we know, generals may discuss bombing almost any place on earth as casually as mere mortals talk about the weather), it also accurately reflects the frustration many military leaders felt at not being able to do anything about North Vietnam's true supply base: China. The bombing campaign against the north had been going full tilt for over a year and was constantly frustrated by the fact that the North Vietnamese were able to withstand the onslaught, in large part because supplies continued to be funneled into the country by road and rail from China.

Another briefing for General Johnson, on July 30, 1966, done by Brigadier General Joseph A. McChristian (Westmoreland's intelligence chief, whose role on the enemy order of battle was a key issue in the documentary), discussed "four out-of-country aerial reconnaissance projects." The first, said McChristian, code-named TROJAN HORSE, was a "high altitude photographic project flown by SAC over Laos, North Vietnam, and Cambodia." He added that "a second high altitude SAC photographic project is called BLUE SPRINGS. This project is targeted against North Vietnam and Southern China." The other "out-of-country" aerial reconnaissance missions were flown at medium and low level over North Vietnam and Laos under the code names BLUE TREE and YANKEE TEAM.

Even though Cambodia was not actively involved in the war, the U.S. was conducting military operations against that country as early as 1966. According to McChristian, MACV (Military Assistance Command, Vietnam) had established an "intelligence collection program directed against Cambodia called NANTUCKET." In April 1966, McChristian said, the Army's Fifth Special Forces

Group had been directed to develop "clandestine collection capability against Cambodia. At the present time there are 10 coded agents and nine prospective sources...." Another long-range reconnaissance program, called BLACK HAWK, was assigned to penetrate enemy-held areas in Laos, Cambodia, and South Vietnam.

(This does not square with Westmoreland's testimony at the trial this Monday [November 26]. In response to a question by CBS lawyer David Boies, the general said: "I had no intelligence capability in Cambodia.") MACV also planned to establish an intelligence network among the Filipino residents of Cambodia, General McChristian said. The U.S. Navy planned a clandestine collection operation targeted against Cambodian coastal ports as well as the river areas from Phnom Penh to the border, he added.

A CIA document found in discovery in *Westmoreland v. CBS* is indicative of the quite strange mindset that gripped the government during the Vietnam war. This document, Special National Intelligence Estimate (SNIE) 14.3.68, appears to argue against a cease-fire in the war because it would hamper intelligence collection! The second page carries this warning: "Due to the uncommonly sensitive nature of this document it should be handled with the greatest care and its circulation should be on a strict need-to-know basis."

This paper, titled "Detection of Infiltration During a Cease-Fire in Vietnam," states that "a simple cease-fire in South Vietnam would mean the near total loss of information from prisoners, ralliers [enemy defectors], and captured documents. This would seriously impair our ability to confirm the arrival of infiltrated personnel in South Vietnam." It adds: "A more restrictive agreement applied over a broader geographic area would mean the impairment, perhaps even the loss, of other important sources: aerial

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and photographic reconnaissance of North Vietnam and Laos, [censored], and some sensor fields. These sources are particularly important in enabling us to estimate the movement of supplies."

Yet another declassified document, U.S. MACV Intelligence Bulletin 6-67, provides some insight into the issues in the case. The trial can be reduced, in one sense, to a key question: Did Westmoreland's command count the enemy right? Well, MACV 6-67 shows that they sure had the resources. In describing a unit called the Combined Document Exploitation Center (CDEC), this bulletin says the center received approximately 16,000 pages of captured enemy documents a day.

These documents were then evaluated, screened, and disseminated very rapidly. CDEC's goal was to "exploit captured enemy documents within 24 hours of receipt." After the captured enemy paper was translated and disseminated, it was sent to the Automated Document Storage and Retrieval System where it was coded and recorded on 35mm film.

This highly developed system had "... the ability to automatically organize the stored documents into categories which maximize their usefulness. This is accomplished by examining randomly stored material, selecting all documents relevant to a given subject, and recording them on a new reel of film. Using this capability, subject files can be built for countries, subjects, and unit designations. Therefore, a specific query would require only a search of one specific reel." Bet the VC wished they had one of those babies!

Short Rounds

... **OWYBOM!** That's the acronym I've come up with to handle the phrase most uttered by Westmoreland's witnesses when talking about the many kinds of VC the U.S. faced in Vietnam. It stands for Old Women, Young Boys, and Old Men. Pronounce it "Oh-whee-bomb." Sounds like a character from *Star Wars*. ... **A Mole at CBS?** Westmoreland's legal team keeps indicating that when it starts calling witnesses from CBS, reporters may be surprised at the pro-Westy testimony, hinting that a high-level CBS employee will come out as a "friendly." ... **Roslyn Carter, Move Over:** Mrs. Westmoreland may take the "steel magnolia" title away from the ex-president's wife when she goes on the stand as the last witness for the plaintiff. Charming to everyone in the courtroom, including documentary producer George Crile's wife, Susan Lyne, Mrs. Westmoreland is also one tough lady. So tough that one member of the CBS defense team, talking about the prospect of "Kitsy" on the witness stand, remarked, "I'd just as soon not be here that day." ■

For the Record

The reader is entitled to know of any past or present associations between *The Village Voice* and the principals in *Westmoreland v. CBS*. Victor A. Kovner, the *Voice's* libel attorney, and his firm, Lankenau, Kovner, and Bickford, have represented George Crile, producer of the documentary. Another law firm will vet any *Voice* articles dealing with the case. Harriette Dorsen, one of Kovner's partners, worked closely with Crile. Her brother-in-law, David Dorsen, works with the Capital Legal Foundation, which represents General Westmoreland. Susan Lyne, Crile's wife, was *Voice* managing editor from 1979 to 1981.

—B.B.